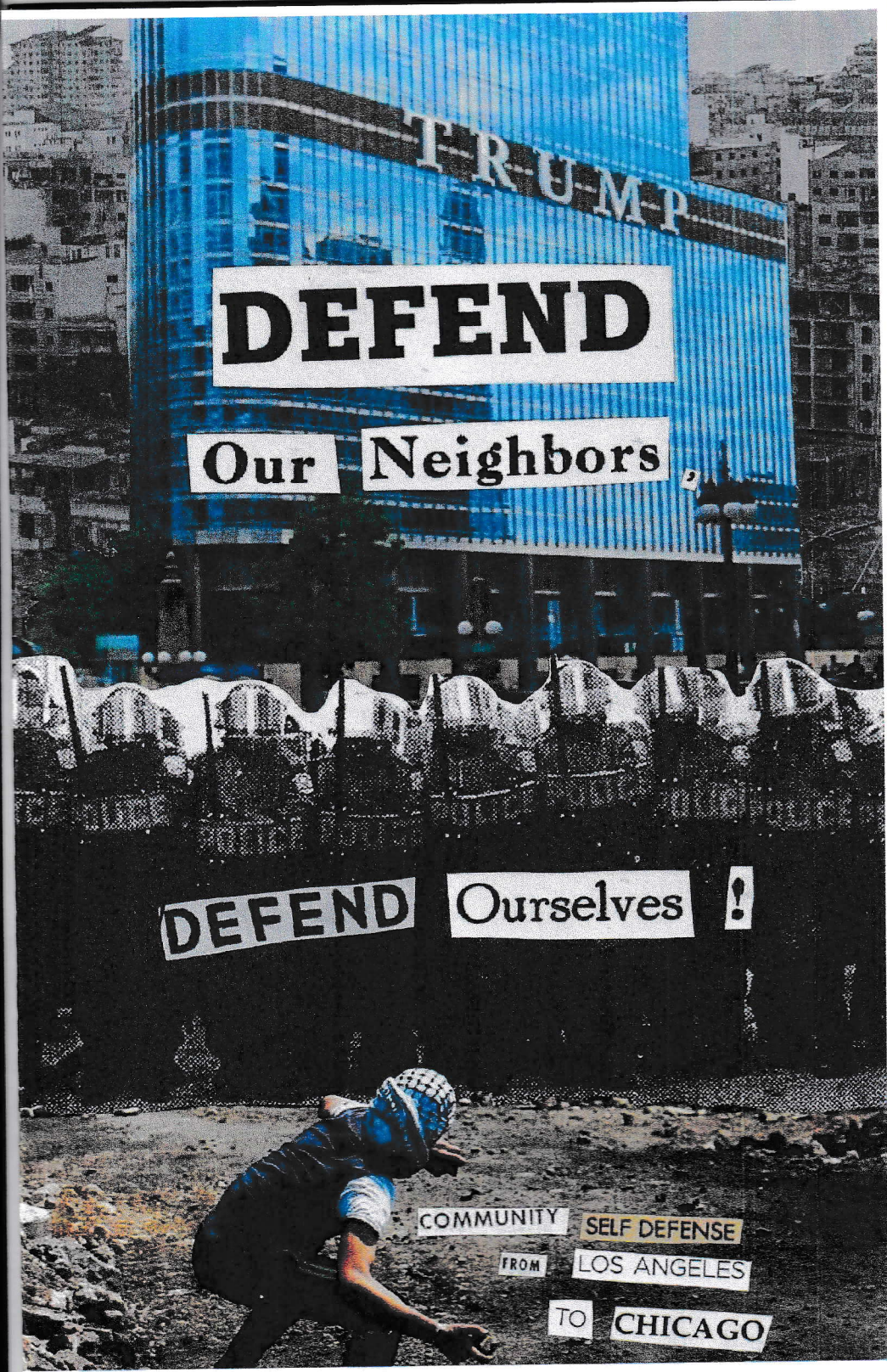




DEFEND

Our Neighbors

DEFEND Ourselves !

**COMMUNITY SELF DEFENSE
FROM LOS ANGELES
TO CHICAGO**

I. no one is coming to save us

As JB Pritzker's state police beat protesters to protect the ICE "processing center" in Broadview and masked agents in unmarked vans kidnap our friends off the streets, it's easy to despair. We know what our conscience dictates: we have to run every federal agent out of our city, and so long as they're threatening our neighbors, they need to be afraid to do their jobs. But everyone who told us they'd stand in the way doesn't do much more than talk. Raids in our neighborhoods don't provoke anything more than consternation, when they're discussed by city and state government at all. Alders who object to deportations are themselves illegally detained, as the agents responsible act with total legal impunity. Trump's unaccountable paramilitary force has received incredible amounts of funding, regular legal processes have failed to check its expansion, and its detention centers are shielded from public scrutiny. Fascist terror is here for entire stretches of Chicago, occupied by agents in military fatigues, carrying long guns and ambushing street vendors from unmarked vans. And since nobody is coming to save us, we'll have to do it ourselves.

II. autonomous self-defense

In crisis moments like these, when state, local and federal governments abandon and terrorize whole populations, people have historically taken the conditions of their lives into their own hands. In the early sixties, in Lowndes County, Alabama, radicals organized autonomous militias and an independent political party to protect Black farmers from state and vigilante violence that they called "white terror." Inspired by their example, a few years later, Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale founded the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, intended to protect poor Black people from police terror. These organizations responded to unchecked racist violence by empowering people to protect themselves: the Black Panther Party taught people their rights, but it also encouraged them to defend themselves however was necessary, including

by taking up arms.

Our own crisis has produced similar forms of autonomous self-defense, pursued independent of whatever politicians and major non-profits have promised. Earlier this year, after the raids in Los Angeles intensified and began to target workplaces and day laborers, locals began to create defense hubs, or "centros." These established a steady presence at key locations intended to disrupt ICE operations, organized at the level of neighborhoods. Unlike previous anti-deportation tactics (rapid response, public protests, and even autonomous blockades of ICE infrastructure), these became a means to intervene **proactively**, deterring and preventing deportations instead of attending to them after the fact.

Instead of establishing control over an area and dictating what its inhabitants are allowed to do, defense hubs support what popular resistance already exists, moving forward from what people targeted and harassed by the police and feds want.

This allows us to use our limited resources more effectively, and gives us spaces to encounter each other as part of a movement broader than our political affinities or working lives: in Los Angeles, defense hubs have provided infrastructure for mutual aid and area patrols, spaces for politicized people to meet each other, and crucially, offered outraged people local, place-based relationships that give their anger direction.

III. setting up a defense hub

First, pick a spot. This should be somewhere that federal agents repeatedly target for deportations. You might have to try out a few locations before you find one suitable for a defense hub. In Los Angeles and Chicago, ICE has made a habit of targeting day-labor corners outside of Home Depots, but anywhere that migrant laborers congregate regularly is suitable, including spots where gig workers rest between deliveries.

While looking at various spots, ask these questions:

1. What is the flow of people and traffic around the site? Walk a few

blocks around the area, and pay attention to local businesses, street vendors, schools, and residential areas.

2. What is local security's relationship to the day laborers? (We have found that every Home Depot where day laborers congregate is very hostile to them, especially when they're visibly poor.)

3. What is the relationship between local business and the day laborers or gig workers at the site? Are there any supportive businesses nearby, and are there any especially hostile ones? Who at the latter actually wants the migrants gone, and who is being intimidated into compliance?

4. What kind of ICE watch presence is there already? What do they need? Are they affiliated with any groups?

5. What supplies do laborers bring, and what might they need? (Ask them!)

6. When and where has ICE been preparing for raids in the area? What are the main ways they've been conducting raids? How might people impede those tactics? How do locals **want** to fight back?

While exploring the area, ask folks who live or work nearby about recent ICE activity. Learning what has happened in recent weeks and months will help you understand how the area works and how you might fit into it.

Second, meet people in the area. To set up an effective defense hub, you will need the participation of other people in the area. Many informal networks have emerged that support local day laborers, interfere with raids, protect targeted people, and keep the area moving despite constant state terror.

It is essential that you relate to locals as collaborators: you may be surprised by the tactics and priorities people bring to this project, and as a defense hub, your role is to support and facilitate them as much as possible. No single group or organization, no matter their funding or professional presentation, should dictate what autonomous self-defense looks like.

Pay attention to the people in the area with reason to know most about how ICE and the police operate: day laborers, people who sleep on the street, vendors, gas station employees, etc. These people are often at

the front lines of neighborhood self-defense, and they'll have insights into relevant tactics and considerations that you don't yet.

Third, start getting organized. If people are comfortable with it, consider adding them to a groupchat on WhatsApp or Signal, which you can use to coordinate patrols and resources, and share verified sightings of ICE. Some of this infrastructure might already exist, especially for patrols. That's good for you!

Reach out to other local groups whose structure might benefit the project. In Los Angeles, the defense hubs sprung up widely because of the Los Angeles Tennant's Union's pre-existing infrastructure: local chapters, the expectation of regular meetings, and experience strategizing to meet their goals. Whoever is brought into the project should agree to explicit, written codes of conduct that guarantee its autonomy from any one of these local organizations, and keep power firmly in the hands of people who work in the area and work on the project together.

Fourth, gather supplies. The physical defense hub will look like a table or two under a canopy, where you'll distribute relevant information, answer questions, give people a spot to rest between patrols, and distribute whatever else you've brought. You can decorate it with signs or banners, which will make it clearer to passers-by and locals what you're set up for.

Try to integrate the defense hub with the area's needs. This will include food and water, but since it's getting cold, coffee, hand warmers, and eventually portable heaters will also be appreciated. Extra chairs for people to sit down and extra winter clothing for people who might not have enough would also be prudent.

Whistles have become crucial pieces of equipment for community-level raid response in Chicago, and being able to provide them to whoever's interested in helping out will go a long way to impeding ICE raids in the area. **The accepted whistle code is: brief sequential bursts if you've seen ICE in the area, and long and continuous noise if you're witnessing an ongoing raid or abduction.**

Other pieces of equipment that friends in LA have found useful include megaphones, walkie-talkies for patrols, and umbrellas for shade.

Print out relevant information: KYR info, information about how to identify ICE vehicles (and which vehicles are not ICE), and legal resources. You will want to make signup sheets publicly available if possible: for patrols, grocery distribution, ride-sharing, and shifts at the defense hub.

Where you set up your defense hub depends on local business's relationship with the ongoing raids. For example, your local Home Depot might not let you stay directly on their property, so you might set up on the sidewalk on the other side of the property line, or on the side of the street nearby.

IV. what can people do?

Now that you have the supplies you'll need to launch your defense hub, you'll need to help fill the gaps in anti-ICE work at your intended location. Below are some examples of things people can do, from experiments in Los Angeles and Chicago, but they're by no means exhaustive. As you help run the defense hub, reflect regularly on whether what you're doing is working, and what new innovations might make it work better. (And share those innovations with your friends at other hubs!)

Bike Patrols: folks on bikes can patrol several blocks around the site, keeping an eye out for ICE vehicles or masked agents. Relaying that information back to the rest of the group can help people prepare, give others time to flee, and facilitate more effective rapid response capable of interrupting raids and abductions.

Foot Patrols: groups of two or three can walk the block directly around the site, looking for the same things as the bike patrols, and blowing on their whistles if they see anyone who is confirmed to be ICE. In Los Angeles people have started wearing identifiers, like armbands or colored hats, to be more identifiable as ICE watch and not plainclothes agents themselves. These groups should focus on particularly at-risk areas around the defense hub, and within a 5-10 minute walking distance of the table.

Car Patrols: ICE watchers in cars can keep an eye out for agents and follow them when they're spotted, if the driver is comfortable doing so. ICE has recently begun retaliating against cars following them,

shooting one woman and tear gassing several rapid responders. People who follow ICE vans should be aware of this additional risk.

Flying Teams: small groups can go door-to-door in the neighborhood sharing information on how to report ICE activity to the defense hub, explain the goals of the project in plain language, and add people to the local group chats on WhatsApp or Signal. Flying groups can also advertise the location of the center itself, encouraging locals to come check it out and help out if they'd like.

Standing Lookouts: individuals can stand at street corners in busy or particularly at-risk areas with whistles to alert locals of sightings, and phones or walkie talkies to relay information back to the hub.

Tabling: volunteers can help staff the main location, keeping watch at the site itself, sharing resources with passers-by, monitoring social media and chats for updates, and helping produce flyers, stickers and zines for the flying teams. These volunteers at the main center can also handle onboarding for the various parts of the project. Some roles require less vetting than others, and it's important to avoid letting security concerns stifle the project itself. It's smart to give these more sensitive tasks to more experienced volunteers, but to make their practices changeable at any moment if the broader group finds them stifling. Good leadership is directly recallable!

V. plan from there

Each location will have its own local particularities. Some businesses will be more or less hostile to targeted migrants, some residential areas will offer more shelter than others, and people will involve themselves at varying speeds depending on whether they trust you. Defense hubs work best when they are proactive, and plan for eventualities which they expect to occur: do people have exit plans during raids? Can groups or individuals provide shelter if it's needed? And among volunteers, having a set, basic course of action during a raid or abduction can help mitigate nerves and frantic, overwhelming feelings of urgency when raids and abductions do occur.

Shifts might be planned based on what hours see most day laborers congregate at the site, and which days; they might also be planned around the frequency and locations of abductions in the area. Right

now, Chicago Home Depots see most of their raids occur in the early mornings, between 7:00 and 11:00 AM, though they've also occurred in the later afternoon.

Some best practices we've learned: first and most importantly, these centers will succeed or fail based on whether you are attentive to the needs of the surrounding area. Just as importantly, and relatedly, do not collaborate with the police. Under no circumstances should someone call in CPD, whether to report ICE misconduct (which CPD routinely ignores, and often even facilitates) or to resolve some street-level dispute which could otherwise be de-escalated without subjecting all its participants to state violence and potential death. This extends to hostile management and security, who may treat you well at the same time as they harass people sleeping on the street or the day laborers you're trying to work with.

This is not a short-term fight, and these pieces of infrastructure should outlast the present moment. Finding ways to coordinate resources and make defense hubs sustainable as initial floods of volunteers trail off and raids continue unabated will be crucial in the coming months. We can deal with this on the front end by presenting volunteers with set and specific expectations for their participation: at least one shift a week for recent volunteers, and multiple weekly for people taking on more sensitive and consistent logistical tasks.

VI. coordinate with other hubs

At the time of writing, several community defense hubs are slowly coming together around the city. Regular communication between these projects will be crucial to overcome their specific limits, and the specific limits that Chicago sets on the project that Los Angeles might not have. (For example: our winters are punishing, theirs are room-temperature.) Over time, these local projects will make space for other place-based experiments to emerge, which will only benefit from broad connections with like-minded people across the city.

Nothing other than bold, ceaseless experimentation will get us through this moment.



we WILL only

**SURVIVE
AMERICA**

together —

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WANT TO

FIGHT ?

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